

Interview with Esther and Karl Handel
in North Eastham, Massachusetts

by Vivian Andrist
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Q: This is an interview with Karl and Esther Handel in their home overlooking Cape Cod Bay in North Eastham, Massachusetts. The date is October 26, 1983 and this is part of the Oral History Project for the Eastham Historical Society. We are going to start, I think, with you, Esther, and put you in time and place. Where and when were you born?

Esther: In Boston. On September 19, 1906.

Q: Okay. And how come you were named Esther?

Karl: Oh, that's a long story. (LAUGHTER)

Esther: My mother had-- now let me go back-- my father had a sister in Sweden, who he was very fond of. She died of cancer. Her name was Alma. So when I was born, my father said, "This is going to be Alma." My mother would have no part of it. And my mother had been a governess for the Filene family, who, of course, she was very fond of. And she said--

Q: This is the department store family?

Esther: Yes. So my father said, "Nothing doing. No Katie--

one of them was Katie-- I'm not going to have any Katies in my family." Well, I guess the time had come for the ceremony and the minister said, "Why don't you compromise and call her-- let me see if I can think-- Esther Katherine Alma Johnson?" So that's what I came into this world with. Esther for a Bible that the minister brought in, Alma for my father's sister, Katherine for the Filene family, from whom I never received a penny. Katherine Alma Esther Johnson.

Q: That's how it happened?

Esther: That's how it happened.

Q: I hate to make a pun, but that's quite a handle. (LAUGHTER)
How about you, Karl? Where and when were you born?

Karl: Well, I was born July 4th, believe it or not, 1903 in Stuttgart, Germany.

Q: Thereby hangs a tale?

Karl: That's right.

Q: All right. Do you want to give it to us?

Karl: Well, what do you have in preference?

Q: What were the circumstances of your birth? And obviously your parents were in Stuttgart.

Karl: Of course. My father was quite a well-known woodcarver.

And Mother traveled quite a bit in France and also in Germany in her younger years, before she was married. And after I was twenty years old, I decided that I would travel to America. And it wasn't all roses when I first came here, not knowing one word of English and not having a job. Of course, I came to my aunt, who lived in Brooklyn, New York.

Q: What year was this?

Karl: I came here in 1923. Yes. And the first job I got was in a sausage factory. Louis Meyers they called it. That was my start. From then on-- I learned a little English, of course. And I was in the ice cream, chocolate candy business. Than on a dare I got back into the woodcarving. I was also an apprentice with my father woodcarving, but I was not anywhere near as good as he was. So I got a chance to get into woodcarving in Williamsburg, in the Brooklyn section of Williamsburg. There I met some of the other woodcarvers and then they left and went to Boston. And on a dare I came to Boston and worked for Irving & Kasson Company on Copley Square. From then on-- oh, then the Depression came--

Esther: Tell them about the Cathedral.

Karl: Oh, yes, we did quite a few well-known cathedrals, woodworks for the cathedrals. One was--

Q: In America or Germany?

Karl: Oh, yes, right here. One of them was St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. There was a million dollars worth of woodwork on the organ case and pwe ends. Just to mention one of many. Well,

Huntington, Long Island had a beautiful cloister and we did all the Stations of the Cross in basswood, which they afterwards gilded.

(TELEPHONE INTERRUPTION)

Q: Let's go back to Germany, Karl, and find out more about your family. Your father, you said, was a woodworker. What were his father and mother?

Karl: I really don't know. Believe it or not, I have no idea. My mother's parents lived in a suburb of Stuttgart, and they were mostly factory workers and farmers, and one of them was a plasterer, and a shoemaker was another one. They lived in a suburb of Stuttgart.

Q: Were they involved in World War I?

Karl: Oh, yes. Everybody was.

Q: You were there then?

Karl: I was there, but I was only-- when the war ended, I was only fifteen years old. So I naturally didn't have anything to do with the war. Of course, we were in poor circumstances during the war. There wasn't that much to eat, and we were glad to get "Care Packages" from America. (LAUGHTER)

Q: You got them from America? Who sent them?

Karl: Oh, yes. My aunt and other people. Friends of my aunt's.

Q: You weren't in any bombings or anything like that?

Karl: Oh, yes. My confirmation-- my sister and I were confirmed the same day, we were Lutherans. And we were confirmed the same day, and instead of sitting down to the confirmation dinner, we had to go down to the basement, because the bombers were overhead. And that day thirteen people were killed in the area, but it didn't harm us any.

Q: You were just a little boy really?

Karl: Yes. Fifteen years old.

Esther: His mother was a wonderful cook. She could take potato skins and make something out of them, make a good appetizing dish.

Q: Really?

Esther: She was fantastic.

Karl: Make a soup out of anything. (LAUGHTER)

Q: Almost had to sometimes, I bet.

Karl: Yes.

Q: Sure, sure. Esther, let's get to you. We have you--

Esther: Excuse me, I am an only spoiled child.

Q: You are? (LAUGHTER)

Esther: The only one in the family.

Q: Okay. You grew up in Boston? Right in Boston?

Esther: Yes. Went to private school. No public school was good enough for Esther.

Q: Now tell me about your parents. Where did they come from?

Esther: My mother came from Kassel, Germany. And my father came from Goteborg, Sweden. And my father couldn't speak German, but they made out very well. My mother didn't speak Swedish either. But enough so that there weren't any secrets. I knew what they were talking about, you know. But my father had horses and carriages. Now what do you call the carriages?

Karl: He was in the hack business.

Esther: Yes, right. And the driver, the horse, and like a footman. And I was taken to private school every morning in one of these cabs. And I felt like a million, you know?

Q: Did you go on for further education in Boston?

Esther: Yes. I went to Teacher's College.

Q: Was that what it was called? Teacher's College?

Esther: Yes, Boston Teacher's College.

Q: And where did you and Karl meet?

Esther: Church. I was very active in the Congregational Church at home and sang in the choir and so forth. We had a German

organist and choir director and he was very active with German men in German clubs.

Karl: He was our director in the German Glee Club.

Esther: Right.

Karl: He asked some of us young fellows to come out to this church and help-- or sing with Easter music. They make a lot of Easter music. So we went' out there, several of us, and that is where we met.

Esther: That's where we met.

Q: Were you both singing or what?

Karl: Yes.

Esther: Both in the choir.

Q: In the choir, right. And did you get married immediately?

Karl: No.

Esther: Oh, heavens no.

Karl: No. The Depression was on at the time and Esther had a good job teaching in the City of Boston. I was working at Irving & Kasson's then. Then, of course, in 1931 the Depression hit carving and I was out of a job for two years. And I just did odd jobs. So-- while she had a nice job and I didn't have any--

Esther: You see, in Boston you were not allowed to be married and teach. Now you can, but in those days you couldn't. So that stopped us from getting married.

Karl: So she gave up a good job for me, you see.

Esther: I think that it was worthwhile. (LAUGHTER)

Karl: We kept company for seven years before we got married. We got married in 1937.

Esther: In my mother's Lutheran Church. That's where I made the mistake. We should have been married in the big Congregational Church where I was so active, but she was against my marrying anybody, the King of England or anybody.

Karl: This goes on the tape, you know.

Esther: Well, that's all right. I don't care. She won't hear it. (LAUGHTER) That was a factor of us getting married too. And I thought that if we get married in her church, a small church, and I wear her bridal gown, that ought to please her. Well, that didn't please her either. Well, anyway, we got married.

Q: You mean, she just wanted to keep you to herself at home?

Esther: That's right.

Q: I see. That happens sometimes.

Esther: It happened to me. An only child.

Q: But now you have a son.

Esther: That we were married? July 7, 1937.

Q: And you had a job by that time, I take it? [To Karl]

Karl: Oh, yes, by that time I had worked in a brewery.

Heffenreffer Story, which is non-existent now. And we made out fine. We had a nice little apartment in Roslindale, and after I had worked there about nine years, we decided to come down to the Cape and take a chance.

Esther: We had this house for a summer place.

Karl: Oh, yes.

Q: Well now, let's go back a little ways. When did you first come down to the Cape? What year was this?

Karl: About 1914, wasn't it?

Esther: When did I graduate from high school?

Q: Oh, you came down first with your family?

Karl: Much earlier.

Esther: I came down with my English teacher. It was April school vacation and I was in high school and I came down with my English teacher, who invited me to come with her and her sister. And we stayed at--

Karl: George Wiley's house.

Esther: That's now where the pizzas are made. right?

Karl: Next door. Next door to the Pizzeria, the Fairway.

Q: In Eastham.

Esther: Right. And I stayed my April vacation with my English teacher and with Susan Wiley and George. It was delightful, let me tell you.

Karl: That was about 1920.

Esther: Cape Cod people. And I raved about it so when I got home, and I wouldn't leave my folks alone until that summer, when it was time for vacation, my mother saw an ad in the Boston Globe and we hired this, sight unseen, and we brought all kinds of electric appliances, iron and so forth, with us. And she hired the house and we came down here for summer vacation. The house stood on Campground Road. Double-- three tiers I think it had.

Karl: At least a two-story house.

Esther: Well, it isn't there any more. It was torn down or moved.

Karl: It stood about where the Landing Store is.

Esther: Yes, right. And my father had to take all the electric appliances home when he went back, because there was no electricity. (LAUGHTER) Kerosene lamps. But it was a joyful place to stay. And it had a great big veranda around it, remember? A porch. Oh, it was great.

Q: How did you get here?

Esther: My father had a car.

Q: Oh, you drove down?

Esther: He had a Rio, didn't he?

Karl: Pierce-Arrow.

Esther: Pierce-Arrow. Yes, for a long time.

Q: What was it like, Esther, in those days?

Esther: Oh, it was lovely. It's too bad that it isn't that way now.

Q: Why was it lovely?

Esther: It was so rural and so peaceful. And the excitement of the day was to walk from that house over to the post office, which would be where--

Karl: Tom Murray's store is now.

Esther: Yes, in North Eastham. And a crowd of us would all go over there together in the evening, waiting for the train to come in and bring the mail. And one time my chum and I walked over there-- she was down with us-- and we decided that we would have a-- what do you call it?--a college ice in those days.

Karl: Something like that.

Esther: What was her first name?

Karl: Ellen?

Esther: Ellen Horzce, the Postmistress. She had a little bit of a window, you know. So we went into the store with all this stuff and we had our college ice. Grace has just passed away in the last couple of years. We never got over it. It was heat with stale nuts. It must have been in the store for two or three years. And we got a big charge. And these fancy chairs with the--

Karl: Ice cream chairs.

Esther: Yes, right.

Karl: Stools.

Esther: And when you went in, Ellen would poke her head through and say, "Esther, you're going to have company this weekend." She read the postal cards. Oh, I tell you, it was just great. It was really delightful. It was very rural. And all the natives sitting on the long bench in front of the post office and this general store, making remarks as you came walking along.

Karl: And we used to take the horse and wagon and went over to the station to get the mail. There was a little country store and post office together.

Q: This was right off of Samoset?

Karl: Well, it was right where Tom Murray is now.

Q: I don't know where Tom Murray is.

Karl: Nauset Market.

Q: Oh, the Nauset Market. Oh, I see, this is in North Eastham?

Karl: Yes.

Esther: In asparagus season, our neighbors picked and bunched asparagus and they had to be over there at the railroad station at half past four to catch the train, put the stuff on to be shipped off.

Karl: And later the trucks would come by and pick up the crates of asparagus and take them to the Boston market.

Esther: Once in a while now you can find an asparagus spear in the field, but not very often.

Q: So you came down every year, every summer, then?

Karl: Right.

Q: For how long?

Karl: Quite a few years, until-- well, until 1932. We stayed at Pierce's over on Aspinet Road. They had a little ell on their house and we rented that about two, three--

Esther: My father and mother had it.

Karl: Your father and mother rented it for about two or three weeks a year. And weekends.

Esther: It was a lonesome place. That too had a big porch, and my mother and father were great card players. And they brought their own company from Boston. And, of course, I was just a teenager. And I used to sit on that porch and I could^{see}/a car over this way on the dirt road, and it proved to be Sadie Gill. She had gone over to do her errands. But/^{that}was the big event of the day, to see that car.

Karl: The owner of this house died. That was-- what's her name?

Esther: Gill?

Karl: Yes. Sadie Gill. No, it's not Sadie-- well, anyway, Mrs. Gill died. And Mr. Chase, who was part owner of this house, wanted to sell the house to settle the estate.

Q: That was Ralph Chase?

Karl: No. Cyrus Chase. So the house was for sale.

Esther: Now wait a minute. Excuse me. He used to tell Sam that a man down below the hill would come up the hill here every day and see Mrs. Gill. Anyway, the house was just like that, with the door there. And there was an old-fashioned chair, a big rocking chair you got with tobacco coupons, and the family in the house had gotten one of those chairs. And Sam would come in and check on Sarah. And he would come in the house and said he could smell smoke. And she had a great big old-fashioned apron on, and after he sat down to check on her to see if she was all

right, suddenly this smoke came billowing out from underneath her apron. [Laughter]

Karl: She had smoked a pipe.

Esther: When she had heard him coming, she put the pipe under there. And when we bought the house, there must have been at least twenty-five different size pipes.

Q: No kidding? She had died then by the time you bought it?

Esther: Yes. They had to pay bills. That is why the place had to be sold.

Karl: Was to be settled for.

Q: What year was this about?

Karl: 1932.

Q: It was your family who bought the house?

Karl: No. Esther did.

Q: You did?

Esther: I had to loan him a hundred dollars for it.

Karl: And I put a hundred dollars in it. [Laughter]

Q: And you weren't even married?

Karl: No.

Esther: Remember, it was in such condition it was ready to fall down. You have no idea. That corner over there was another room. And the straw matting on the floor. And there had been grandchildren or somebody living here that had used that for a bathroom. So you can imagine. When we came down weekends, we burned sulphur candles the whole weekend we were here. And then we had kerosene lamps and candles. And there was a big old black stove over there. And this was the "settin'" room, wasn't it?

Karl: Yes. Well, it was a settin' room in a way, but in the wintertime it was also the kitchen. They had a big table there and that's where they washed their dishes and threw the water outdoors. But this room, the present kitchen now, was a summer kitchen. They had summer kitchens in those days. They had a wooden sink on the end and the water ran outdoors.

Esther: When we bought the house, that wooden sink was still there, of course. And there was a dead skunk in one corner of the kitchen and a half a ton of coal.

Q: In the corner of the kitchen?

Esther: Yes.

Q: Was this the original woodwork?

Karl: This is all original. It was painted and it had that alligator skin there, you know, from the heat from the stove and so forth. I took it off and finished it natural.

Esther: I'm going to tell you how much we paid. We bought the house as it was, a mess, and twelve acres of land for eight hundred and fifty dollars.

Q: [Laughter] Well, you know what you have now.

Karl: Do you think we'll get our money back?

Q: I think you might, with interest. [Laughter]

Esther: Many times we've been offered.

Q: Oh, it is a little gold mine.

Esther: But where would we go? We love it so much.

Q: Yes, of course. Absolutely. Well, when did you move into it then?

Esther: We were married in 1937. And when did you give up your job and we came down?

Karl: We came down here in the fall of 1942. The same time as Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, your parents, bought the place over where the Viking Motel is now.

Esther: That was their place.

Karl: We came down. I took a chance. The first two weeks I worked with the mosquito control. Then I got a job at the Wellfleet Curtain Factory as a shipper and assistant manager. And from then on-- well, I then got a job in Orleans. There was a little glove

factory where the Land Ho is now, in back of the Land Ho. I was managing that. After that I went back to painting, which I had done in Boston while I was out of work. So I worked for a man in Orleans and after two years--

Esther: He died.

Karl: Well, he didn't die then, but after two years he laid me off. So I started my own business, which I ran for twenty-seven years. My own little painting business.

Q: Out of this house?

Karl: Out of here.

Q: What did you call it?

Karl: Well, I didn't call it.

Q: You didn't call it? It just was?

Karl: In the beginning I worked out of the trunk of my car. Then I finally bought a little truck. And I really had a good business.

Esther: He had an excellent clientele.

Q: Good. And then you taught at the little schoolhouse, where we have the museum now, Esther?

Esther: No.

Q: Oh, you did not? Somebody told me that you did. You taught

Esther: Yes.

Q: Were you under Otto Nickerson?

Esther: I sure was.

Q: All right. Let's talk about him.

Esther: Oh, I can't say enough.

Karl: You started teaching here in 1948.

Esther: When George was in the third grade.

Karl: Yes.

Esther: To go back-- we hesitated coming down here to live, because we had a son then, you know. And I said, "He's going to miss all the opportunities of the city, the public libraries, the symphony-- Boston Symphony-- and so on and so forth. And I walked the road out there weighing it back and forth. Well, we took the chance and it couldn't have worked out any better.

Q: Really? You just have the one boy, George?

Esther: Spoiled rotten. [Laughter]

Q: Well, he sounds pretty good to me. Just for the tape, what does he do?

Esther: He's a pilot for Northwest Airlines. He doesn't want me to tell anybody that.

Q: Why?

Esther: I don't know. I'm so proud of him, I can't understand it.

Karl: He is at present a 747 pilot. He is flying 747 freighters between New York and California.

Esther: I didn't know Otto that well, but somebody came and asked me about him, because they were having trouble with discipline. I had George in the third grade and everybody would say to him, "How's your mother as a teacher?" "She's terrible. Everything that anybody else does, I get blamed for it." It was true. If I would get mad, I'd take it out on him. [Laughter]

Q: Well, how did you happen to go back? Was it just you were interested in teaching?

Esther: I guess. And I always loved it. They had a teacher there that wasn't swinging too hot with discipline and so forth, and the class was running wild. So I went back.

Q: What grade was this?

Esther: Third.

Q: Third grade.

Esther: Yes. Third and fourth I had, and I loved every minute of it. I'm sorry that I have retired.

Q: Are you?

Esther: I loved it.

Q: What kind of fellow was Otto?

Esther: A second Abraham Lincoln. He was just marvelous to everyone. So understanding. Shall I tell her?

Q: Well, sure.

Karl: What?

Esther: Beautiful Dreamer.

Karl: No. No, don't do that.

Esther: No. One of the other teachers took his music for him, which is only natural. And he would-- when she took his class, of course he was free then for about a half hour or so. And he would come and stand outside my door, and he knew that my class was singing "Beautiful Dreamer". We'd be all way off pitch, and he would go through all kinds of antics. And there I had a class in front of me and I had to keep-- and to this day he will still remind me of "Beautiful Dreamer". [Laughter]

But I'll tell you another one. This won't affect anybody. I'd be teaching-- so I probably would be having difficulty with some youngster who couldn't read or couldn't get the math right. And I would go to him when I had a chance at recess and I would say, "Oh, Otto, what shall I do? So-and-so just does not get the multiplication tables and I've worked so hard with him." "Well, Esther, don't you know his parents?" "Yes." "Well then, what do you expect?" [Laughter] Just typical.

Esther: Excellent. And, you know, they all loved him.

Q: Everybody did, whether he was a harsh disciplinarian or not?

Esther: Exactly. He had the eighth grade, seventh and eighth grades at the time. And when it came June-- well, first it would be Valentine's. His class would bring in hand-- what do I want to say?

Karl: Ice cream mixer.

Esther: Ice cream mixer. And they would on Valentine's make homemade ice cream. Of course the school was small, but every class shared in that ice cream. And when it came June and it was hot, he would take his whole class down to the pond, Salt Pond, for a swim. Delightful. Never could you replace Otto. And the kids worshipped him. And he would come to you and he would say, "I have a problem. Come with me into the coat room or closet." And he would have a kid over there and he would have a strap behind his back, Otto would. And he would show it to the kid and he would say, "Now, listen. I've given you many chances. This is the last one. See this?" "Yes." By that time, as Otto said, crocodile tears were showing. "And if you do this again, you're going to get it. Hold out your hand." And he would give him one crack. I had to be there as a witness. It didn't amount to a row of pins. But there was order in that school.

Q: In those days, you didn't have parents coming and complaining about physical punishment?

Esther: Oh, the parents loved him. When he retired, we gave him a--

Karl: A greenhouse.

Esther: A greenhouse, yes. The townspeople. He never did anything with it. I was amazed that he didn't.

Q: Because he is quite a gardener.

Esther: Oh, yes.

Q: Yes, I know it. Who were the other teachers there? Can you talk a little bit about them?

Esther: Esther had first grade. Do you know her?

Q: No, I don't know her. Is she still alive?

Esther: Yes. And she's a lovely, lovely person.

Karl: Della Macomber?

Esther: Wait a minute. Who had first grade. I never was teaching while she was there. She was an old-timer. Well, anyway--

Q: Not Miss Kelly?

Esther: No. What was her name?

Karl: Keefe.

Q: Keefe is the one I meant.

Esther: Yes. She wasn't there when I was there. And then Virginia Horton. And Della Macomber. That's about it. And Otto, of course. And then the school really grew.

Karl: In those days there was only the one building.

Esther: That's right.

Q: What I think of as the new Eastham Elementary School.

Esther: She's right. That was the new Eastham Elementary School.

Q: They left what's now the Schoolhouse Museum and transferred down to this new building, right?

Esther: Right.

Q: And that's when you came in.

Karl: But it was only one building.

Q: Only one building, and then they put the wings on. Right?

Esther: Right.

Karl: The one building was built in 1936. There were only four rooms.

Esther: You know Otto, having a green thumb, there were always beautiful flowers in school. Monday morning when he came in, he'd have a bouquet.

Q: Were you people involved at all in the town? Were you on

Esther: I was in the 19-- Tercentenary?

Karl: The 1951 celebration. Tercentenary.

Q: What did you do in that?

Esther: Oh, let's see.

Karl: You were just on a committee.

Esther: Yes, but we took children, as Otto did, and we went down to the site of the First Encounter and had them come in on the water, with Pilgrims and so forth, you know. When the Indians first met them. And-- oh, a celebration almost the whole summer. There was always something going on. Very nice.

Q: Do you remember Winnie Knowles?

Both: Oh, yes.

Q: Sadie interviewed him, Sadie Flint, and Angela Riedel. And he was talking about this Tercentenary and the traffic jams and so forth. He had a lot to do with them, you know. What kind of guy was he?

Karl: He was all law and order. He would pinch his own grandmother if she was wrong.

Q: I understand that people didn't go over thirty miles an hour through Eastham.

Karl: You bet they didn't.

Esther: Oh, no. No.

Q: What would he do? Lie in wait?

Karl: He was always on the job. That's one thing you can say for him.

Q: You know who did a lot for the elementary school children too was Fred Jewell.

Q: What did he do?

Esther: Oh, he used to bring films up. The films weren't perfected as they are now, but--

Karl: Gave them lectures.

Esther: Of course he and she had traveled all over and had things to show the children. The children loved him. And he was very interesting.

Who else used to come up there a lot?

Karl: Captain Clark. See, Otto had all these people that he knew that used to come and talk to the kids. I don't think they do any of that now.

Q: What about Captain Clark? He was gone before we came.

Karl: Yes. He lectured on whales. He was the whale expert.

Esther: He lived in Sandwich. I know he has somethings in the museum.

Q: Tell me, what was the feeling around here when the Mid-Cape Highway came through? How did you personally react to it?

Karl: Well, we didn't think it was too bad. We thought it was all right, because it cut quite a bit of time off the time it took to come down.

Esther: You know, when you got to Eastham, you had to go around the corner where Mr. Jewell lives now. You had to go all around there before you got on the main road again.

Karl: And around the other way, where Clayton [Horton] lived, you had to go around there. That causeway wasn't there.

Q: Was this a gravel road? Before Route 6 became the Mid-Cape Highway.

Karl: No. It was a macadam road when we came.

Q: What about the National Seashore? How did you feel about that?

Karl: We liked the idea. Because it would conserve all that side from shacks being built and-- you know. It really conserved quite a bit of land. There'd be nothing but shacks over near the light now if it hadn't been for the Park.

Q: There was reaction here to it though?

Karl: There was. Definitely. But we weren't against it.

Q: Do you go to town meetings quite a bit?

Esther: Oh, the town meetings used to be delightful.

Q: What do you mean, used to be?

Esther: Well, they aren't-- they are entirely different now.

Q: In what way?

Esther: Some of the old-timers would get up--

Karl: It was more rural. The people were different. Now we are quite modern.

Esther: And somebody would get up and speak about something in the audience, you know. Maybe they grew up together. Who was it, Mr. Zack, who was so--

Karl: Mr. Zack was very active. Captain Daniels. ^{Shinned} ~~Shinnon~~ Dill. They all were very well read and also were pretty smart to express their opinions and had some humor interjected into it.

Esther: Right. Katherine Moore and her husband Maurice were very active in Town Meetings. And they would go to Boston and go to the State House and look up things before the Town Meetings, so that when they got to their feet, they knew what they were talking about. I don't think people really appreciated it at the time.

Q: Well, I know Maurice seemed very-- people used to laugh at him when he got up of recent years, but he knew what he was talking about.

Karl: Oh, you bet he did.

Q: He really did. And he cared genuinely for the town, I know that.

Esther: He sure did.

Q: Did you know Maurice Wiley?

Esther: Yes, very well.

Q: What about him?

Esther: Well-- he was a quiet soul anyway, wasn't he?

Karl: He peddled groceries, you know, for a Wellfleet market. He and Maurice Gill.

Esther: Are you talking about Maurice Wiley? Wasn't that who peddled groceries-- wasn't that George Wiley?

Karl: Oh-- Maurice-- oh, I'm sorry, I don't know anything about him.

Q: Maurice was the Selectman.

Esther: Yes. Myrtle was his wife, a schoolteacher. He was a hard-working farmer.

Karl: George Wiley was connected with the Wellfleet Grocery store. And so was--

Esther: Gill.

Karl: Gill. What was his first name? They lived in that house

that has been removed now from the corner of Route 6 and Governor
Prence, that house that they took off when the road went through.

[Irrelevant Conversation]

Q: Let's go back to this house for a little while. Do you know
how old it is?

Karl: There are no records, but this old man, Sam Nickerson, who
lived down in an old house down below, told us what his grandfather
told him about the house. Therefore we thought it is around two
hundred years old. He told us that it was part of the salt works
down on Sunken Meadow South and it was moved up here, when we
don't know. And you see on some of these-- some of these boards--

Esther: Over there on the wall.

Karl: We exposed one there. You can even see some of the salt.

Esther: The white--

Karl: And up on the roof boards you see still salt on it from
the salt works.

Q: Where were they located?

Karl: South Sunken Meadow.

Q: South Sunken Meadow. Right down here?

Esther: There was an old fish wier out there, remember?

Karl: Well, that was later.

Q: So you really don't know when it was moved?

Karl: We don't know. All we know, as I say, is what Sam Nickerson told us about the house, what his grandfather told him.

Esther: Also he told us that somewhere in this house, this what's her name-- Chase, who did all the smoking-- used to like to drink. So he said, "Somewhere in the partition, Esther, you'll find a pint." [Laughter] Well, we have had the house all apart, we've never found the pint.

Q: Maybe that was just a suspicion on his part.

Esther: I think so. He was just hoping we'd find it. Karl used to come-- when we first came here to live Karl came weekends. I don't know why. Anyway, having worked in the brewery all day, he had a Boston bag, and he would fill it up before he left Boston with maybe a half a dozen bottles of beer. And he would arrive Friday night. Sam would be up here the very first thing Saturday morning and he'd sit in the kitchen and he'd tell us all the things that had gone on in the town. How the Town Clerk had put the money in his pocket, which he didn't have the right to, for taxes or something, and finally he would get his courage up and he would say, "Well, Karl, did you bring anything?"

Karl: "Did you bring anything for the inner man?"

Esther: "--for the inner man. You know it puts hair on your chest and I need some." And Karl would produce the beer.

Q: The bottle of beer for him? [Laughter] What else about Sam Nickerson? Was he Art Nickerson's--

Esther: Grandfather.

Karl: He was a frank man. He was a character. He was really a real Cape Codder.

Esther: Yes. He was married and separated many years before that. And on the main road, where the flower place is--

Karl: The Mayflower Nursery.

Esther: Right. There is still an old house over there. And there used to be a big barn and he'd have--

Karl: They used to dance there.

Esther: Yes. And he was one of the dancers. And then you'd see him walking by here sometimes, going up the road. And he was going up to a little house where his second wife--

Karl: First wife.

Esther: First wife, had married again and was living there. So he'd say, "Well, I'm going up there and give-- whatever his name was-- my sympathies for marrying her." [Laughter] And he meant it. He really did.

Karl: He used to visit her.

Esther: Yes, he did. But there aren't too many old-timers left.

Q: Not too many. I know it. But you can sort of find people who knew them, like you do.

Esther: But that's going to die out.

Q: That's right. Did you by any chance hear any stories about rumrunners? Prohibition?

Esther: I think so.

Karl: In 19-- I don't know whether it was '32 or '35, the rumrunners had dropped a whole pile of bags of booze out there on the flats.

Q: Right out in front of your house?

Both: Yep.

Karl: And the next day you saw horses and wagons going down into the flats and everybody paid the tax that year. [Laughter]

Esther: That's right.

Karl: That's the truth.

Q: Did you know anybody personally who ran?

Karl: Oh, yes. Bill Steele went down. He lived on the corner of Aspinet and Massasoit. But that house is--

Esther: It's still there.

Karl: It's still there, right.

Q: Is that Steele Road?

Karl: No, no.

Esther: No, Aspinet Road.

Karl: Massasoit and Aspinet. That corner. The house is still there, but it's been renovated somewhat.

Esther: But he went down and got some.

Karl: Yes, he went down with his wagon and got some booze and evidently sold it.

Esther: You know, when we finally got to live here, you'd see natives go by here on a Saturday morning and go down to Wellfleet to the package store.

Karl: After Prohibition was repealed.

Esther: Yes, right. They didn't want us or anybody else to see them sneaking down there. [Laughter]

Q: You mean Eastham was dry?

Karl: Yes, it was.

Q: Was it? So they had to go to either Orleans or Wellfleet?

Karl: Well, even after it was repealed in Eastham, the people didn't want to be seen going into a liquor store, so they went to § Wellfleet.

Q: I see. [Laughter] It's certainly different these days, I guess.

Karl: I'm proud that I can afford it if I want it.

Q: Were you connected with any church?

Esther: Down here?

Q: Yes.

Esther: No. We have become connected, but it doesn't mean too much, with the Federated Church in Orleans. When we go, that's where we go. However, we have been to a couple of services here at Methodist, and he's fascinating, especially with the children.

Q: Were you connected at all with the Grange?

Esther: No, we never went in for that.

Karl: No, we're Masonic and Eastern Star.

Q: Oh, so you wouldn't be.

Esther: The Grange by then was slowly on its way out.

Karl: Yes. Not that bad. They were in good order then. They went down twice.

Esther: There wasn't any interest.

Karl: No.

Q: Can you remember any of the battles in the town at the Town

Meetings or otherwise? Things that were controversial, you know?

Esther: They would be in the Town Meetings, but I don't remember any of them.

Karl: No, I don't really remember any.

Q: Sadie [Flint] was mentioning that there was quite a little fight about building the new elementary school.

Esther: Oh, I don't doubt it. We weren't here.

Karl: That was before we came here to stay.

Esther: I can imagine that there would be.

Q: Let's see, what else have we got? The Second World War-- where were you? Were you here?

Karl: Well, we moved here in '42. It was about the middle of the war.

Q: Yes, it started in '41.

Esther: You were at the curtain factory.

Karl: Yes, I worked down there. There was a Canadian woman who wanted to make it tough for me, because I was in charge and I had to tell her to do things. And she wanted to get back at me. So she reported me to the FBI, that I was a German and that I was subversive. But my boss, Mr. Wilson, when they came to investigate me, he says, "He's all right. Just leave him alone."

The other one wasn't even a citizen and I had been a citizen for thirty years. Well, not thirty years, twenty years.

Esther: Also, somebody came here to us-- to me especially, one day during the daytime when you were down there working-- and said that-- at that time you had to pull shades down at night, was that right? And somebody came to me and said, "You know you must pull your shades down at night."

Karl: You've got that story all--

Esther: Yes. Well, I did, I ^{said} / it to him. Because we have that nice view, you know, and I said, "Why do I have to pull the shades down?" "Well, because there might be submarines out there." And I said, "Well, I kind of doubt this. I'm not pulling my shades down, because if there were submarines out there, they would be German, and I'd invite them in for coffee." [Laughter] He never forgave me.

Q: He never forgave you?

Esther: No. He said, "You shouldn't say that." Well, I meant it. It would be nice to see some German people. You know, we could have talked their language. [Laughter]

Q:
Do you speak German?

Esther: Oh, sure.

Q: And obviously Karl does too, I'm sure.

Esther: Oh, sure. When we were over there a couple of

I could make out very well. The cart before the horse , but-- .
And now we have a grandson, George wrote the other day that
Jeffery, who is a junior in high school, his class is taking
German and his class wants to go to Germany in June and wondered
if Karl-- Grandpa-- would want to come along with them. I don't
know. It depends. Jeffery should really stay with his class,
because they have a leader and a--

Q: But it was a very nice thing, for him to ask.

Esther: Karl and Jeff were supposed to go this last year. But
then he was taken ill, so he couldn't go.

Q: Yes. Well, there never was a submarine scare here, was there?

Both: No.

Esther: No, we've heard so, but I don't think there ever was.

Q: Nothing you knew anything about?

Esther: No.

Q: There was evidently some signal going out--

Esther: From the ocean?

Q: Yes. That we heard about. I think Winnie Knowles talked
about it. I'm pretty sure.

Esther: Well, didn't they fire-- in Orleans-- ?

Karl. They fired a barge out there. German U-boats sank a

barge or two. We really weren't--

Esther: We weren't interested.

Karl: We weren't interested. We didn't know.

Q: Let me ask you about a couple of people. Did you know Captain Sparrow?

Karl: Oh, sure.

Esther: Very well.

Q: What kind of man was he?

Esther: Shrewd.

Karl: Very nice man. Typically Cape Cod. I worked for him. Very kind and so was Mrs.

Esther: Did you know Mrs.?

Q: No. She's the one who just recently died, wasn't she?

Karl: Yes. I don't know too much about him, but he was connected with I think it was the Cunard Line or some shipping company.

Esther: Ship chandler, wasn't he?

Karl: He was a captain.

Esther: Oh, that's right. We know the other Sparrow. We used to go-- what was Jenny and--

Karl: Oh, Dan and Jenny--

Esther: Dan was his brother, wasn't he?

Karl: Yes.

Esther: We used to go up there for milk, When we first moved here. They were nice people too. They were the ones who had a big family.

Q: Can you think of any anecdotes about Captain Sparrow?

Karl: No. We didn't know him that well.

Q: And Bernie Collins, did you know him?

Karl: Oh, yes. He was a nice man.

Q: Any stories about him?

Esther: No, not really. I wouldn't know him that well. I mean, we knew him, but not that-- stories from Otto you would get on Bernie. Have you ever interviewed Abby?

Q: No, I couldn't, because she's not up to it.

Esther: What about Ken Collins?

Q: And Ken we'll get around to. We try to get the older people. Not counting you. [Laughter] But we interviewed Otto. We had a couple of sessions with him.

Karl: Oh, yes. You got a lot of information from Otto.

Q: Yes, a lot. We certainly did. And that was fun. Can you think of anything else that you'd like to put on tape about Eastham or about your life here?

Karl: I really don't know right this minute.

Esther: The only thing I don't like and I regret, I hate to see these bulldozers going by here. That means another house.

Karl: That you can't stop.

Esther: It's progress, I know it is. But it ain't what it used to was. You'd go over to the post office, you'd know everybody there. But not now.

Q: I know that. If you had your life to live over again, would you change anything?

Karl: I wouldn't.

Esther: No, I wouldn't either.

Q: How great! How great!

Karl: No. We're doing all right.

Esther: Yes, we've become very active.

Karl: After forty-six years married, I think we--

Esther: To one man, that's a record on the Cape.

Q: Why?

Esther: I'll tell you a story. It'll come on there.

Karl: No, you won't!

Esther: Oh, yes, I will.

Karl: Oh, no, you won't.

Esther: George, when he was a little boy about-- I don't know, he must have been ten or eleven years old-- somebody asked him, as they would, "Are your parents Cape Codders?" And he said-- somebody must have told him this-- he said, "No, my parents aren't Cape Codders. In order to be a Cape Codder, you have to live here twenty years. Ten years with your own wife and ten years with somebody else's wife, and that makes you a Cape Codder." [Laughter]

Karl: You'd better delete that.

Q: No, that's the sort of thing I want.

What was your opinion of the reaction of the native Cape Codders when you moved here? Were you-- did it take you a long time to get--

Karl: We were accepted more or less. We've had no trouble. But an awful lot of people say that they were

Esther: Everybody was very nice to us.

Karl: To us they were. We had neighbors down here-- we used to get milk and eggs there and we'd go over to Dan Sparrow's and get milk and eggs.

Esther: And down to Hoffman Lane.

Karl: Yes. We didn't just go and get these things, but we'd talk for about an hour or so about different things in the town. But we were accepted. A lot of people say that they didn't.

Q: What do you attribute that to? A sort of a--

Esther: I don't know. Does that happen nowadays, do you think?

Q: Oh, I think so, yes.

Esther: People are not so friendly?

Q: Well, no, it's just a question of not really being accepted. Well, certainly right away. This is a New England trait. Very much. You sort of wait until, say, the dust settles.

Esther: Right.

Q: You know, and you get to know people and then/^{if}everything goes all right, then they're part of you.

Karl: They've resented the city slickers coming down and taking over. And we do now.

Esther: Yes, they do now.

Q: Well, we do too. You know, it's the old story.

Karl: I think after we got here, they should have closed the bridges.

Q: That's right. That's what everybody says. [Laughter]

Well, I'm going to turn this off now, and thank you both very, very much.

(END OF INTERVIEW)